

Charter Commission Minutes

Amherst Charter Commission meeting of Monday, July 3, 2017, Police Station Community Room

Members present: Nick Grabbe, Tom Fricke, Meg Gage, Mandi Jo Hanneke (chairing), Irv Rhodes, Diana Stein, Gerry Weiss.

Members absent: Andy Churchill, Julia Rueschemeyer,

Collins Center: Tanya Stepasiuk

Agenda

1. Call to order, approve agenda, approve minutes (5 minutes)
2. Public comment (15 minutes)
3. Review and edit master draft language (all articles) (3 hours, 10 minutes)
4. Topics not reasonably anticipated by the Chair 48 hours prior to the meeting
5. Planning: future meetings, public feedback (30 minutes)
6. Adjourn

SUMMARY: This meeting was devoted to technical drafting of various sections of the draft charter, working from the following documents:

- Master Draft - June 28, 2017
- Transition Article Draft – July 3, 2017

The work of this meeting is reflected in the subsequent drafts:

- Master Draft – July 7, 2017

Additional notes on aspects of the discussion follow.

Meeting called to order at 5:33

No minutes to approve.

Mandi: Diana had something she wanted to address.

Diana: I specifically propose we drop having primary elections. We would be having a primary for 27 counselors. Also, I asked Town Clerk to give cost – it's outrageous. It's over \$23,000.

Nick: I think there's a significant amount of merit to what Diana said. I also think it would be a good idea to move up rank choice voting.

Meg enters at 5:40

Irv: I agree with Diana, I wasn't aware there was an increase in cost. However after talking to numerous people I do not see where the intellectual argument where there would be a significant difference in the quality of candidates. For that reason I would not like to face the possibility of having back-to-back elections.

Diana: My understanding is the transition section is a recommendation, it's not forcing us to adopt rank choice voting.

Discussion on how to address rank choice voting.

Irv believes transition time needs to be left open due to unknowns

Meg: I support Diana's idea.

Mandi: Diana would like to drop preliminaries...

My concern is to what Irv said (more votes in one election vs other)

Mandi believes narrowing the field through preliminary election allows for extra 5 weeks of discussion.

Nick: Although I support Diana's proposal I hasten to share...(story of how election with rank didn't work)

Irv: I just don't see how we gain anything...heavens we don't even know how many people will be running. It doesn't look practical...I just don't see where we going to get a huge turnout – to justify primary and general.

Tanya and Gerry agree discussion may only be regarding one election...

Tom: I think you're being too quick to dismiss number of candidates...

Irv: A reasonable argument but not you're talking about a quarter of the competition...

This is real competition. People think twice about putting their name in a hat.

Tom: It would be different.

Irv: And you have to go up against people you know.

Tom: So that was one point...If we're going to adjust the language of the study commission...well how do we do that? Right now it reads...(page 7)

Mandi: Could we do "for the purpose of adopting rank choice voting or similar methods..."

Others are in favor.

Mandi: Could we adopt preliminary elections for just that first town council election?

Debate...

Irv: Why are we doing this? Give me some rationale that we are doing this? (having primary and general)

Tanya states without primary there are too many candidates and could lead to confusion.

Irv believes not cost effective...

Irv: Convince me why it's cost effective to do it the second time...

Diana moves to write charter in such a way that there will be one preliminary election five weeks before November election solely for reducing the number running for the first Town Council – and that preliminary elections are removed from the charter as a routine thing.

Nick seconds.

Mandi: I would like to make friendly amendment...so that the preliminary town council election coincides with state primary...

Irv believes it should only be council members and no other elected officials...

All in favor of Diana's motion: unanimous.

Moving to transition provisions...

Diana makes motion to have electable housing authorities to be elected every 2 years starting in 2018.

Motion seconded.

Discussion regarding the pros and cons of such a move.

Motion passed: Unanimous.

Housing authority to be rewritten and new section added.

Planning board...

"No appointments shall be made until attrition reduces the number serving down to seven members..."

Irv proposes to increase ZBA to five members...

Motion passes: 6-0-1 (Gerry abstains)

Meg proposes to increase council president pay to \$8,000.

Vote to increase pay for council president to \$7,500.

Unanimous in favor.

Tom leaves at 8:26

Transition provisions

How many signatures needed to run:

20, 50, 100

Settled on 25 for ward councilors–

Irv argues for 75 for at large

“work harder”

Consensus leaves signatures at 25 and 50

8.2 A – provision for residents to call a meeting of council, school committee, or library trustees via signatures

Irv would agree to include if bar was raised to 100

Gerry: is there any reason to have section A?

Mandi: Do people want to delete it?

Tanya: If you're a resident of the town you know you can “do this...if you do this...”

Nick: Another way you can participate

Gerry: Okay

B. Group petitions

Diana: Doesn't town clerk have to certify?

Tanya: You don't have to...

Mandi: If we're holding public hearing I want them certified

Do we want a public hearing?

Irv: If it's going to be serious it should be a hearing

Mandi: I'm okay with that if we move to 100

Consensus to move to 100 and public hearing

Irv is on record as saying what they adopted for free petition “is lunacy”

Future meeting planning:

Wednesday meeting will start with Section 8

Meeting adjourned at 9:35

Respectfully Submitted,

Emmett Warren